



Supreme Court of Illinois

November 5, 2015

SUPREME COURT ANNOUNCES RESULTS OF COURT USER SURVEY

The Illinois Supreme Court has announced the results of a court user survey that measured public perceptions and experiences with trial courts across the state. Overall, the results show that court users have a very positive view of the courts in Illinois.

"My colleagues and I on the Illinois Supreme Court are gratified to learn that so many of our fellow Illinoisans have a positive opinion of the justice system," Chief Justice Rita B. Garman said. "We want to thank those who assisted the court with conducting the study and, in particular, the individual court users who took the time to provide thoughtful answers to the survey questions."

"The survey provides us with valuable information we can use to improve not only public perception of our court system, but also its efficiency and effectiveness. We plan to conduct a thorough analysis of the survey results to determine what actions we can take to increase public confidence in our legal system even further. Then, with the assistance the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC) and the Strategic Planning Committee, and with the involvement of judges and court administrators throughout the state, we will take action to implement changes that address the needs and concerns of the public we all serve."

The recommendation to conduct a survey designed to evaluate the perception and experience of court users came out of the Supreme Court's Future of the Courts Conference in 2013. The Strategic Planning Committee of the Illinois Judicial Conference, in coordination with the AOIC and under the Supreme Court's leadership, developed the survey.

"I would like to thank the entire state judiciary for its collaborative effort and hard work in taking on this challenging initiative," said Appellate Court Justice Carol Pope, chair of the Strategic Planning Committee. "We appreciate the public's willingness to provide us with their honest opinion on how we are doing our jobs. By taking a frank look at ourselves, we can make improvements that will increase the public's trust and confidence in the courts."

The survey was distributed to court users in every circuit courthouse in Illinois between about April 13, 2015, and May 1, 2015. The chief judges of the 24 Circuits were provided with the surveys and instructions. Each county was assigned a minimum number of surveys to collect based on the volume of court filings there.

More than 12,300 completed surveys were returned to the AOIC and analyzed by faculty and students at Loyola University Chicago. The survey was composed of two sections of positively phrased statements about the court system and a third section that required respondents to provide background information, including age, gender, race, income, education, what they did at the courthouse that day, how often they go to the courthouse, and if they live in an urban, suburban, or rural area.

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The first section of statements was designed to gauge court users' general perception of the courts. The second section was made up of statements to be completed only by respondents who were in a courtroom that day as it aimed to measure court users' experiences in court. Survey respondents were asked to use a scale of one to five to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements.

No circuit received an average response to any of the survey questions that was below three (a neutral response) and no circuit had a majority of users indicating negative views to any of the questions.

Although the court users surveyed overall had positive views and experiences with Illinois trial courts, the results demonstrate that certain background characteristics were related to respondents' perception of trust in the court system, assessment of the quality of the courts, and their overall opinion.

For instance, respondents who identified themselves as African-American or Black had somewhat lower perceptions of trust in the courts than respondents who identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino or Caucasian or White. The majority of African-American respondents, however, still held neutral to positive views on trust in the courts, assessment of the quality of the courts, and overall opinion of the system.

Results also show that respondents who indicated it was their first time in the courthouse evaluated the courts more favorably than frequent users. The same was found for those who reported higher incomes and those living in rural areas, but again, all respondents, including frequent court users, respondents who reported lower incomes and those living in urban areas still held positive views of the courts.

While gender did not produce any differences in respondents' views of the court system, results demonstrate age did. Young respondents 18 and under reported higher levels of trust in the courts and were more likely to have positive views of the courts than respondents between the ages of 36 and 50, while those between 19 and 35 reported lower levels of trust than middle-aged respondents.

Justice Pope and Dr. David E. Olson, a professor at Loyola University Chicago who served as a principle investigator on the data analysis, presented the results of the survey at the annual meeting of the Illinois Judicial Conference, which took place October 22, 2015.

Dr. Olson described the survey as "a bold and monumental initiative" and said the findings were "very positive."

AOIC Director Michael J. Tardy said the survey marks a first for the Judicial Branch in Illinois and demonstrates the Supreme Court's ongoing effort to improve and make the court system more accessible.

"The results of this survey are very encouraging and provide insight into areas for change and improvement, as well as the potential to conduct more surveys in the future," Director Tardy said. "It is important to note that announcing the results of the court user survey does not mark the end of our efforts. We continue to work to ensure that the court system is fair, efficient and accessible for all."

The statewide results of the survey can be viewed on the Illinois Supreme Court's website at www.illinoiscourts.gov.